SPORT ITALIA HELLENIC LEAGUE –PREMIER DIVISION

(Played on Sunday 27th August 2006)

GROUND-HOP SUCCESS FOR SLIMBRIDGE

LATE COLE GOAL EARNS THE POINTS

HARROW HILL 0, SLIMBRIDGE 1

Craig Cole came off the bench for his first senior game since last January, to score the 88th minute goal that broke the hard-working Foresters hearts, but kept his side's winning start to the season intact.

Being the first English game in this year's Anglo-Welsh Ground-Hop, kicking off at 11-00am on Sunday morning, in a sunny, picturesque setting, with a decent crowd of 260 spread around the banking of the ground, there was a somewhat surreal feeling to the early proceedings, with both sides taking time to adapt to the unusual conditions.

With Tim Haddock still struggling with an injury, Mike Green retained his place in the Slimbridge starting line-up, which was unchanged from the previous match at Wantage, with the exception of John Cant starting in place of the 'blister-tormented' Steve Badham. Craig Cole and Johnny Meadows were named in the squad for the first time this season, both coming on in the latter stages of the match, the former, to devastating effect for the home side, and a hero's acclaim from the travelling away support.

An exchange of free-kicks into the respective boxes failed to disturb some solid defending, and it was not until thirteen minutes had elapsed that Cant went on a lively run, bearing in from the left into the Hill area, and saw his cross hacked away to Fred Ward, who shot narrowly over from the right, that the game seemed up and running.

Shortly after, at the other end, Ryan Pendrey burst through on a surging run but could not keep his shot on target. Pendrey, who had a big game in support of a game Hill attack, twice had distance efforts go just over the bar, in the home side's sporadic forays into the visitors half.

Slimbridge settled into a measured, attacking mode, realising that they were going to have to graft against a well-organised defensive unit to force a breakthrough. Clear first half chances were scarce with both Robbie Colwell and Kacey Johnstone having to live off crumbs, although they both went close as the interval neared.

After the break it was more of the same for a good while. Hill were looking to capitalise on swift break-outs to their front men, Eddie Weyman and Jodie Taylor, who were having to be watched carefully by Ashley Thomas and Allton Axton, in particular.

Just past the hour mark, the hard-working Jamie Inch shot straight at home 'keeper Andy Reid from a good opening, forged through some impressive inter-passing between Ward and Johnstone. Half chances fell to Cant, Colwell and Johnstone in the ensuing ten minutes, which were kept out, but the pressure was building on a Harrow Hill side giving everything for the cause. Hill were gaining some sympathy from many neutral Ground-Hoppers in attendance, willing them on, in the age old tradition of supporting the underdog! All good humoured banter which makes ground-hop games so unique!

Weyman could not quite get the ball down to clearly chip the tall Adam Thomas in the Slimbridge goal in a scare for the visitors, but the action was quickly back to the other end with Ward cutting in from the right to deftly project the ball inside the far post, only for goalkeeper Reid to win a thundering round of applause with a quite brilliant tip round his post.

Manager Doug Foxwell's last throw of the dice to try and prise open the stubborn Hill defence was to bring Cole on for the exhausted-looking Ward, who had run himself into the ground, with just nine minutes remaining. The fresher looking Cole then got involved in a couple of right-wing moves that came to nothing.

Then, with just two minutes left it all went wrong for the home side, as Cole calmly took advantage when the tireless Colwell prodded the ball free from the attentions of a defender, which gave Cole the time to steady himself and place the ball beyond the despairing dive of Reid, from six yards out.

What time remained was played out without any further alarms at either end. Both sides must have felt shattered after the contrasting efforts of the game, never a classic of course, as local derbys rarely are, but an interesting game that drew some appreciative applause for both teams at the final whistle.

Harrow Hill; A.Reid, M.Reid, R.Workman, P.Frowen, T.Burford, R.Clark, R.Pendrey, S.Jones, J.Taylor, E.Weyman, W.Freeman.

Slimbridge; Adam Thomas, L.Sterling, J.Cole (J.Embling 68), Mike Green (J.Meadows 62), Ashley Thomas, A.Axton, E.Ward (C.Cole 81), J.Inch, K.Johnstone, R.Colwell, J.Cant.

Referee; Mr. K. Bushnell (Witney)

Assistants; Mr. T. Cleasby (Eastington)
Mr. D. Commander (Innsworth)

Attendance; 260